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SUBJECT: SPLM POLITBURO MEETS IN RUMBEK

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The SPLM Politburo met in Rumbek from April 2 to 5 to discuss the internal organization of the party, select officials for unfilled slots, and debate policy options. The meetings were reportedly more cordial than expected. CG Juba was in Rumbek at the time and picked up the following snippets, although the concluding press conference and release of the communique occurred after his departure. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Politburo meeting in Rumbek, scheduled for two days, stretched into four. The marathon sessions were interrupted by the May 3 travel of Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) President and SPLM Party Chairman Salva Kiir and others to attend the inauguration of an Italian built bridge that opens a land corridor to Yirol. All SPLM ministers in the Government of National Unity (GoNU) save the State Minister of International Cooperation attended the politburo. GoSS Vice President Riek Machar and GoSS Minister of Transport and Roads Rebecca Garang were also there, along with most of the prominent officials in the GoSS. Former Sudanese Vice President Abel Alier and other notables arrived for the concluding ceremony. GoSS Minister of Cabinet Affairs Justin Yac was notably absent, undergoing medical treatment in South Africa.

¶3. (SBU) From the margins, it seemed that the Politburo lacked the factional fireworks that some had predicted. There were reportedly some contentions, but most were resolved through compromise. We have not laid hands on the final communique yet (septel), and did not cover the press conference that took place a full day later than scheduled, but from side conversations gleaned the following:

-- There was a split over whether National Assembly SPLM Chairman Yassir Arman or former SPLA Commander for the North Abdul Aziz al-Hilo should be named the Politburo's Deputy Secretary General (DSG) for the North. Arman partisans

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argued that the SPLM needed a Northerner in a senior position if it were to try to compete in the North; those behind Aziz argued that the transition areas should fill the slot. In the end, Arman prevailed. The DSG for the South is a Bari physician from Juba just returned from abroad, with whom we are not acquainted.

-- The SPLM National Conference will take place in September, a compromise between those who favored December and those who pushed for June.

-- SPLM finances were subject to long debate, and eventually it was resolved to request a grant from the GoSS to support the party. Details of this arrangement were not explained.

-- There was great emotion surrounding the situation in Abyei, with a strong consensus that the decision of the Abyei Boundaries Commission must be binding, as stipulated

in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Calemont Yada, former head of the South Sudan Council of Churches, will become the SPLM's point person on Abyei.

-- According to one source, Salva Kiir will reportedly serve for an indeterminate period as Minister for SPLA Affairs, making him the top person in both the military and civilian chains of command. (Note: This is in addition to his serving as GoNU First Vice President, GoSS President, SPLA Commander in Chief, and SPLM Party Chairman. End note.)

-- The position of Under Secretary for SPLA Affairs will be created; no appointment was made.

-- The Politburo discussed how it will prepare for public consultations in Blue Nile State and the Nuba Mountains.

-- There were complaints from some quarters that Upper Nile and Bahr El Ghazel - areas respectively supportive of Machar/Kiir and Kiir -- were underrepresented on the Politburo. At the time of CG's departure, no changes to the Politburo structure had been decided.

-- The Politburo refused to budge on the CPA formula for Khartoum serving as a secular national capital versus as a northern state.

-- They resolved that the University of Juba should be returned to the South and fall under the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology.

-- There was considerable anxiety over security. The need to devise a workable plan for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and the status of facilities for the SPLA came under discussion.

-- The Politburo said that it would push for additional

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funds to speed up repatriation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the North. They decided that port facilities in Yirol, which are in a shambles, should be rebuilt to facilitate return by river. An Italian firm has reportedly agreed to undertake this project.

-- According to one source, the Politburo agreed to devise a "grand strategy" for working with the National Congress Party as well as the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and other parties. Details were painfully scarce.

-- The same source said that they had opted for a strategy of negotiation in the East, following guarantees that UNMIS that will fill the void when SPLA forces withdraw, reportedly by May.

-- There was discussion of Darfur and confirmation of who will take the SPLM/GoSS lead in support of a negotiated peace settlement. Again, details were painfully scarce.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: What was not discussed was significant. To the best of our knowledge, there was no discussion of corruption or the White Nile/Total petroleum exploration and development rights controversy, although a Northern journalist said that he planned to raise these issues at the concluding press conference. Most of those with whom we spoke said that the debate centered mostly on how to reorganize SPLM internal structures to facilitate the evolution from military movement to political party. While many of the policies reportedly decided appear positive on the surface, we will withhold final judgment until the details are clear. End Comment.

STEINFELD